

# GRASSLANDS PARK

## A REALITY!

### CANADA'S NEW GRASSLANDS NATIONAL PARK

by Jo McCrea, Regional Information Advisor for Parks Canada's Prairie Region, Winnipeg  
(Reprinted from PARKS. 1981. vol. 6(3) pp. 15-16.)

Canada's newest national park - the 29th - encompasses one of the largest and best formations of relatively unmodified grasslands left on the North American continent.

The unique natural habitat, the original short-grass prairie of North America - a landform not preserved anywhere else on the continent - will now be protected in Grasslands National Park, a maximum of 350 square miles of southern Saskatchewan, located between Val Marie and Killdeer near the Canada-USA border.

Grasslands Park will also protect several endangered species of wildlife and birds as well as unique cultural features such as archaeological evidence of early Indian lifestyles and early ranching.

An agreement to establish the park was signed June 29, 1981, in Regina by officials of the federal and provincial governments.

The Government of Saskatchewan and Parks Canada have for many years discussed the desirability of establishing a national park in the Val Marie - Killdeer area. The park agreement assures that this relatively unspoiled prairie landscape, one of the most important elements of Canada's natural mosaic, is protected in perpetuity under the Federal National Parks Act.

Canada's national parks are large natural areas which protect and preserve outstanding representations of the country's natural heritage. More than 50,000 square miles (129,500 km<sup>2</sup>) of Canada's vast lands and diverse ecosystems are found in national parks from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and from the 49th parallel to the Arctic Circle.

Saskatchewan will identify 100 square miles (259 km<sup>2</sup>) of land for park purposes, in two separate and unbroken units with at least 36 square miles (93.24 km<sup>2</sup>) in each. This will be expanded to 350 square miles maximum (906 km<sup>2</sup>) when the park is fully established, an area sufficiently large to support the flora and fauna native to the Canadian short-grass prairie. The boundaries of the park cores will be established by the two governments after resource inventory studies identify national park values and commercial resources explorations are completed.

The Grasslands National Park will provide unique recreational and interpretive opportunities. Facilities and services to achieve these opportunities will be determined during the preparation of a management plan for the park. The management plan will also assess the desirability for other facilities to be located on the periphery of the park, such as hotels, restaurants, guest ranches, and recreational facilities and to avoid intrusion of structures on the prairie landscape.

The agreement provides for a detailed study of the oil and gas potential in the park area. Environmental protection guidelines will be issued so that there is minimal impact from these activities on future park lands. Those areas found to have commercial reserves will be excluded from the park and exploited by the province. The environmental study will be undertaken in conjunction with an oil and gas exploration program.

No development of park facilities can be undertaken until adequate park land has been acquired by Parks Canada in negotiation with property owners and leaseholders in the park area.